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June 26, 2014

Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

I write to you on behalf of thousands of Detroit residents who face an imminent threat to their health and welfare. I respectfully request that you exercise your authority under Sec. 319 of the Public Health Service ("PHS") Act and declare a public health emergency to expand access to medical and public health services for Detroit residents facing the consequences of widespread and draconian water service terminations.

As you may know, the City of Detroit is currently pursuing an aggressive shutoff policy for residents who are either \$150 or 60 days behind on their water bill. The newly-announced policy has resulted in the disconnection of water service to at least 7,556 households and local businesses. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), currently under the control of appointed emergency manager Kevyn Orr, continues to threaten as many 3,000 customers every week with water service termination. As a result of this practice, we are hearing accounts of pregnant women, families with children still in diapers, the elderly and the infirm, all losing their access to water. According to the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, two-thirds of the terminations are taking place in homes with children. As roughly half of the city is now eligible for shutoffs, we believe that immediate action is necessary to stem the consequences of this counterproductive and coldhearted policy.

As the former President of the Global Development Program of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, you are well aware of how critical water, sanitation, and hygiene are to the well-being of every person and community. Without water

service, households cannot maintain basic hygiene practices: flushing their toilets, bathing, or washing their hands. A lack of adequate drinking water during the summer months can lead to heat stroke and other complications. We all know that the first resource we must secure in any crisis is clean and safe drinking water. By cutting it off for thousands of Detroiters, the city is creating a public health emergency that must be urgently addressed.

Under Section 319 of the PHS Act, you are empowered to declare a public health emergency lasting up to 90 days. I am asking that you exercise that authority, and expand access to medical and public health services for Detroit's citizens facing the dire consequences of losing ready access to one of the most essential of all human needs. While I and other stakeholders are pursuing other avenues to ensure an end to this shutoff policy, we must unfortunately prepare to address the health crises that may emerge from the status quo.

It is my hope that you will investigate this situation and declare a public health emergency, so that medical and public health professionals can plan for the consequences of a widespread loss of this essential service.

I thank you for your attention to this emerging crisis, and I am heartened that someone with your unique insight is at the helm of HHS during this time of need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Conyers, Jr." with a stylized, cursive script.

John Conyers, Jr.

Member of Congress